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Thursday 7 July 2011

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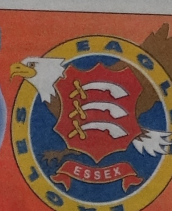
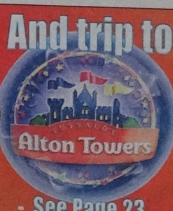
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EVICTED SET TO TURN VIOLENT

THE £18million eviction of an illegal Traveller site in Crays Hill looks set to descend into violence after campaigners threatened retribution against bailiffs vowing: "We are going nowhere".

Tensions rose on Thursday after Basildon Borough Council agreed the final piece of funding to allow the multi-million pound eviction to go ahead. On Monday they served 51 plots at the Dale Farm site in Crays Hill with 28-day enforcement notices - although an eviction is not expected until after 31 August.

Dale Farm resident, Mary Slattery, reacted to the news defiantly saying: "The Council are spending money for nothing as we are not going anywhere."

"Constant & Co evicted my brother's place in Borehamwood. This time there is too many of us, with too much to use. I pity the ones who come in first - there'd better be some ambulances to take them out as we are not going without a fight."

Specialist bailiff company Constant & Co, who claim on their website to be a 'one stop shop' for Traveller evictions, have been hired by Basildon Council to perform the eviction after completing similar enforcement action across the country.

Outside of Thursday's meeting East of England MEP Richard Howitt expressed his fears that violence could erupt if enforcement action is taken telling the *Enquirer*: "I am very worried that a forced eviction will lead to violence and will see the problem pushed further down the road and not solved. There are children, the sick and elderly who are innocent victims in this and their voices should be heard."

The enforcement notices have come after a decade of disputes over the land which Travellers bought and settled on without planning permission in 2001.

Crays Hill resident John Lucas argues that evictions are an unfortunate necessity after years of negotiations with the Travellers over new sites broke down.

"Nobody wants to spend these large sums of money but after years of legal wrangling this is what it has come to," he said. "As a local resident all I want is for others to have to abide by the same laws we do."

Travellers and over 1,000 campaigners on social networking site Facebook have vowed to set up 'Camp Constant' from Saturday, 27 August - creating a human shield around the site in an attempt to prevent any eviction.

Weekend training camps have begun since Saturday including civil disobedience workshops and the building of a blockade at the entrance to the site to prevent any vehicles entering.

Margaret McCarthy, a resident of

"I pity the ones who come in first - there'd better be some ambulances to take them out as we are not going without a fight" - Dale Farm Traveller site resident Mary Slattery.



Travellers and their supporters made their views known outside last week's meeting.

end. We will do what we have to do. If they come we will move to Oak Road, wait until they have left and move straight back in."

Essex Police have agreed a £9.5m funding strategy to allow policing of a 'worst case scenario' eviction - including £1.2m from Basildon Borough Council's reserves.

£1.2million in funding available to helping eviction policing costs if they exceed £5.5m.

The move was labelled a "U-turn" by opposition councillors after assurances had been given in March that no funding would be offered to help with policing costs.

Council leader, Cllr Tony Ball, defended the move arguing that the



Taste-testers...

SCHOOLCHILDREN from Basildon took part in a blind-folded taste test to learn about healthy eating last week.

To find out how they got on see page 5.

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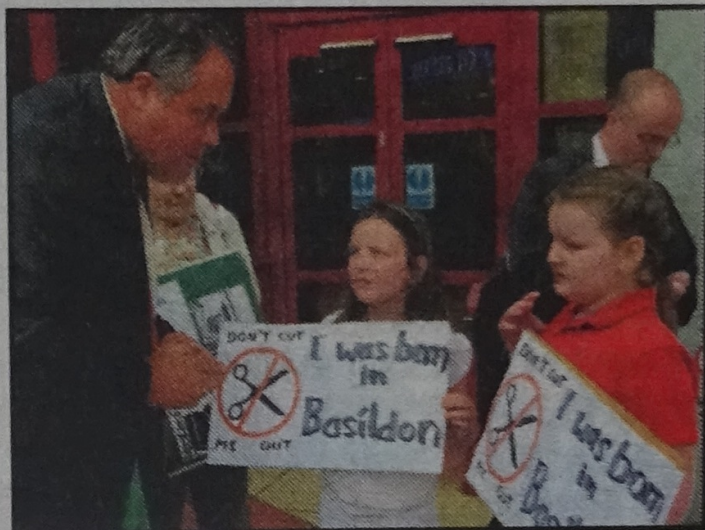
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to funding from the Government to assist in the £8m eviction costs the council will incur.

Liberal Democrat leader, Cllr Geoff Williams, was clearly animated as he opened debate saying: "It beggars belief that we are back here again. It appears to taxpayers that our borough is a financial bottomless pit."

The Conservatives were also described as "gutless" by Labour leader, Cllr Lynne Gordon, for not standing up to leader Cllr Ball who has staked his political career on successfully enforcing planning law at the Dale Farm site.

In his first contribution to a debate in the council chamber since his recent election, Cllr Andrew Gordon, stumbled as he vigorously defended the Travellers saying: "We are in a recession; we are not supposed to be spending the Council's reserves. Really, what harm are they doing? You call these people criminals, the only real criminals are sitting over



■ MEP Richard Howitt offered his support to the Travellers.

there" - as he pointed at the Tories.

The Tory defence was led by Cllr Malcolm Buckley who said: "I am not surprised by the contributions tonight from the other two parties as they do not believe in upholding the law of the land."

Cllr Tony Archer followed swiftly after reminding opposition benches: "All these costs could be avoided if gypsies and Travellers moved off now. You cannot simply pick and choose the laws of the land you wish to obey."

Ahead of the vote Cllr Ball assured the public the Council would fulfil all of its homelessness duties and urged Travellers to be aware of their responsibilities to their elderly and their children who could avoid the stress of an eviction if they left peacefully.

Closing he said: "We cannot turn a blind eye. The easy thing would be to do nothing - that is the wrong thing."

The decision was taken to a vote with 29 councillors in favour and 12 against.

■ Rabbi Janet Burden travelled from Hackney to protest outside Basildon Council's meeting to decide on funding the Dale Farm eviction. Speaking to the *Enquirer* she said: "I believe that the history of the Jewish people calls on us to stand up for the vulnerable. It is easy to make the link between the Traveller and Jewish communities as society has little tolerance for people who choose to live differently."

